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No. 8.

Hebrew Education in Palestine

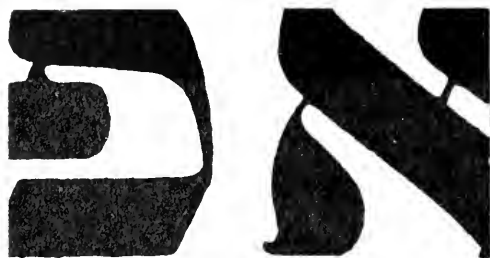
by

LEON SIMON.

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Hebrew Education in Palestine.

AMONG all the manifold branches of work that have to be undertaken by a national movement, there is none more vitally important than the work of education. This is true of a national movement among a people which is already concentrated, to a greater or a less extent, on its own historic soil, but is robbed of the possibility of full national development, or is in danger of losing its identity through the influences of a foreign culture stronger than its own. In such a case, the success of a national movement must depend on the extent to which the younger generation retains its hold on the national ideal: and that in turn must be determined very largely by the extent to which the younger generation is educated in the national spirit, taught to know and to reverence the national past, and accustomed to regard as valuable whatever survives of the national tradition. Education is, then, the very life-breath of a national movement. But of no national movement is this so emphatically true as of Zionism, which is an attempt to restore national life to a people cut off almost entirely from its ancestral land, scattered over the face of the earth, participating in every culture, speaking all languages, assimilated to all types of national life, and thus in constant and ever-growing danger of being split up into fragments, and losing all semblance of national cohesion. The problem of Zionism is much harder than that of other national movements. It has to bring back the people, or some considerable section of it, to the land—a task complicated by all sorts of political and economic difficulties: and at the same time it has to secure that the heterogeneous body of human beings so brought together shall be fused and moulded into a recognisable national group. The first of these objects is to be achieved by organisation, political effort, and practical colonising work in Palestine; the second demands above all things a national system of education for those who are to live in Palestine, since it is primarily through education that the fusion of the diverse elements into a

national whole must be brought about. It is idle to argue as to the relative importance of the two kinds of work. Both are essential. But, if it is true that the aim of Zionism cannot be achieved without the concentration of a large number of Jews in Palestine, it is equally true that Zionism cannot fulfil its function as a national movement without national education in Palestine.

But what, it may be asked, is a national education? An answer is obviously impossible, if what is expected is a precise statement of the methods that a national education ought to adopt, and the subjects that it ought to include. A national education is defined rather by its aims and its results than by its methods or content: it is an education which aims at producing, and does produce, in a given group of human beings, the sense of being a nation, of being bound together, and distinguished from other groups, by a common national tradition and a common national hope. But two requirements may be postulated as essential. In the first place, a national education must be carried on in the national language: for that group-sense which is necessary to the being of a nation is intimately bound up with the tie of a common and distinctive idiom. And in the second place, a national education must insist on maintaining and emphasising the sense of continuity with the national past. A new nation may be formed in course of time through the fusion of a number of heterogeneous human beings who happen to be congregated in a given piece of territory. But if what is desired is not a new nation, but the continuance of one already in existence, then the link with the past is all-important: and while in the case of an established nation that link may be maintained by the persistence of beliefs, customs, and habits of thought and action, which are handed down unconsciously from one generation to the next, in the case of a nation struggling for new life, and uncertain of its hold on its past, the school has an important part to play in familiarising and vivifying the distinctive elements of the national tradition to the minds of the growing generation.

Thus, while the precise form and scope of the national education that we need in Palestine cannot be mapped out in advance, it is at least essential that the education should be in Hebrew, which is our national language, and that it should pay considerable attention to the history of our own people, to the

characteristic ideas and ways of thought with which our national life has been associated in the past, and to the literature in which those ideas and ways of thought are embodied. It is important to remember that the battle is not ended when Hebrew has been established as the language of the school and the university. It is possible to conceive a national group educated in the Hebrew language, and yet educated in a spirit quite different from, and even hostile to, that of our national past, and so becoming in effect a new nation, attached by no real tie of historical continuity to the Hebrew nation of days gone by, or to the Jewish people of to-day. This danger is sometimes exaggerated by anti-Zionists, who regard the revival of the real Hebrew nation as a bad thing, and are therefore very ready to seize on and denounce any development which seems likely to lead to the creation of a Hebrew-speaking but un-Hebraic national group—since it is convenient for them to mask their antagonism to the real revival under a righteous opposition to the sham. We need not take too seriously their suggestion that the life and education of Jews in Palestine cannot claim to be Jewish unless they reproduce in every detail the mass of rite and custom and belief which has attached itself to Judaism in the long centuries of exile. We must be prepared for development in Palestine, and for far-reaching development. But we shall do well to remember that the maintenance of historical continuity is far more important for Zionists, who want the Hebrew nation to live, than for anti-Zionists, who do not, and that continuity cannot be secured by language alone. The problem of working out an education which shall satisfy the demands of past and present alike is one of the most difficult of those that confront us in Palestine; but it can be solved if it is approached in the right spirit. And the insistence on Hebrew is a necessary condition, if it is not a guarantee, of a really national system of education.

The problem as it presents itself to us to-day did not exist for the philanthropic organisations of Western Jews which first took in hand the provision of educational facilities for the Jews of Palestine. They had no vision of a restored Jewish national life; they scarcely even recognised in Palestine a country having special claims on Jewish effort. The problem of the Jews in Palestine was for them but a part of the general problem of the Jews in the East, who were sunk in poverty, ignorance

and superstition, and needed to be uplifted by education of the western pattern. Thus the task which these organisations set themselves was entirely different from that of Zionism, and their work in Palestine has no direct bearing on the creation of a system of national education in our sense of the word. None the less, their work is by no means without importance from the Zionist point of view. If not for them, the conditions with which Zionism had to cope when it commenced its work in Palestine would have been far different, both for good and for evil, from what they actually were. Some account of the work of these organisations is therefore necessary in a survey of Hebrew education in Palestine.

The earliest and biggest of them was the *Alliance Israélite Universelle*, founded in Paris in 1860. The *Alliance* aimed at being an international organisation for the protection of Jewish interests throughout the world, but in practice it remained predominantly French, and its sphere of work was restricted to the Orient and Eastern Europe. As early as 1870 the *Alliance* founded an Agricultural School—*Mikveh Israel*—near Jaffa. This step was due to the influence of a Rabbi of Posen, Hirsch Kalischer, who in 1862 advocated the agricultural colonisation of Palestine by Jews; and the school might have done much to further that end if not for the French spirit which permeated its teaching, and led its pupils to prefer emigration from Palestine to remaining in the land. Some years later, when there was a considerable influx of East-European Jews into Palestine, the *Alliance* considerably extended its educational work in the country. Between 1881 and 1906 it founded over a dozen schools in the principal towns—Jerusalem, Jaffa, Haifa, Safed, and Tiberias. Besides ordinary boys' and girls' schools, the *Alliance* has special schools for training in handicrafts. Generally speaking, the tendency of its schools is to give a French education with a slight Jewish colouring. The language of instruction is French; the teachers are for the most part imbued with French culture, and have no interest in Palestine for its own sake; and the result is that the ideal of the pupils is generally to get to Paris. Thus, while the *Alliance* has done excellent educational work, in the sense that it has provided an education and the possibility of making their way in the world for thousands of children who without it would have remained ignorant and economically useless, yet from the point of view

of national Jewish education its alien spirit and ideals make it a danger. It should be added, however, that not all the Palestinian Schools of the *Alliance* are of quite the same type. A good deal of freedom is left to the teachers, and, where they are to some extent in sympathy with the national movement, the schools are less aggressively French. The *Mikveh Israel* School is a case in point. The recent appointment of a new headmaster, whose leaning is towards Hebrew, has transformed the spirit of the school, and it may yet become a valuable asset of the national revival.

The contribution of English Jews to Palestinian education is the Evelina de Rothschild School, which was founded in 1880, and was taken over by the Anglo-Jewish Association in 1898. Naturally, the language of instruction was English; but the school reflected English and Anglo-Jewish characteristics in two ways which gave its development a different turn from that taken by the schools of the *Alliance*. It was more inclined to lay stress on the Jewish religion; and it was more open in practice to the influence of ideas to which its supporters were opposed in theory. Hence the school was able not only to maintain a Jewish spirit, but even to admit Hebrew as a language of instruction for something like one-half of its curriculum. In practice its pupils are much more at home in Hebrew than in English; and while the school is not likely ever to become avowedly Hebrew, it may be expected that it will be more and more influenced by the Hebrew revival, and will never be a stumbling-block in the way of national education.

The *Hilfsverein der deutschen Juden*, the great German-Jewish organisation which does educational work in Palestine, has moved in a direction precisely opposite to that taken by the Anglo-Jewish Association. The *Hilfsverein*, founded in 1900, at a time when the Hebrew revival was already well established, appeared to be very amenable to the new influence, and its schools were practically Hebrew schools from the start, despite the absence of any avowed nationalist sympathies. The *Hilfsverein* lays special stress on Kindergartens, of which it has three in Jerusalem, three in Jaffa, and one each in Haifa, Safed, and Tiberias. It has also a Teachers' Seminary and a Commercial School in Jerusalem, as well as Boys' and Girls' Schools. Thus this organisation promised to be a valuable asset to the cause of national education. But three or four

years ago a change came over its policy, and a tendency set in to introduce German as the language of instruction. The result of this change was the "language struggle" which followed the disagreement between the Zionist organisation and the *Hilfsverein* over the proposed Technical School at Haifa.* This struggle has produced a breach between the two organisations which is possibly irreparable: but it has had also the effect of stimulating the cause of Hebrew education in Palestine, through the opening of a number of new Hebrew Schools in the towns.

The three bodies mentioned above, English, French, and German, have all worked to provide a modern education for Jewish children in the Palestinian towns: but each has worked along lines conditioned not so much by any specifically Jewish aims, as by the outlook which its leaders derived from being themselves assimilated to the culture of this or that European country. Their activities helped to determine the conditions with which Zionists had to deal when they in turn came face to face with the problem of education in Palestine. On the one hand, they had familiarised certain sections of the Jewish population with the methods and subjects of western education. They had established schools of a modern type, a type hitherto unknown to Palestinian Jews, who but for their efforts might have remained content to leave their children either without education or with no education other than that of the *cheder*. Also, they had introduced education for girls, thereby making good a very serious deficiency in the traditional Jewish system, which generally regards *Torah* as an exclusively male privilege. But on the other hand, they had set up a false conception of the object to which Jewish education in Palestine should be directed, inasmuch as they had associated the idea of modern education with the idea of English, French, or German education. Thus from the Zionist point of view, which demands a system of education that shall be modern in method and extent, but at the same time true to the national spirit, and free from any tendency to assimilate the pupils to other nations than their own, the work of these organisations was in some ways helpful, but in others harmful. This, however, applies only to the towns. In the agricultural colonies, which sprang up as a direct result of nationalist strivings, the Zionist idea had freer

*See Pamphlet No. 7—"Palestine and the Hebrew Revival"—p. 11.

scope in the field of education. The schools in the colonies were not provided by philanthropists for Jewish children who would otherwise have had no education (at least in the modern sense), but came into existence with the colonies themselves, and therefore they express, with more or less completeness, the spirit which animates the colonisation movement.

There are about thirty Jewish agricultural Colonies in Palestine (excluding farms and small settlements), and each of them has its school, where the children of the colonists receive an elementary education. The language of instruction in all these schools is Hebrew. That seems a simple and natural fact, but it is in reality the result of a great deal of idealism and hard work. For the mother-tongue of most of the colonists was Yiddish, and the line of least resistance for them would have been to bring up their children also in Yiddish. But the idea of the return to the national language was closely bound up with that of the return to the national land, and the teachers, who were enthusiasts for Hebrew, found no opposition on the part of the parents to their determination to make the schools of the colonies Hebrew schools. The difficulties with which they had to contend arose rather from the fact that Hebrew had been so long out of use as a medium of every-day intercourse, and was not even their own mother-tongue, nor the language of the homes from which their pupils came. It speaks much for the enthusiasm and the ability of the early teachers that they overcame these difficulties, and established Hebrew firmly as the language of the schools. It is thanks to their work that, though the older settlers still retain their Yiddish, Hebrew is the natural language of the younger generation of Palestinian Jews on the land, and that, so far as language can secure it, the attachment of the colonists' children to their people and their land is secured.

The education given in the colony schools comprises the usual elementary school subjects, as well as Arabic, some knowledge of which is necessary for the Palestinian Jew. The Bible and Jewish history are, of course, taught. In some of the colony schools the pupils are taught French. This is explained by the fact that many of the colonies were for some time (and some still are) under the control of the Jewish Colonisation Association, which is a French body. Even in those colonies which are now wholly independent the school is subventioned.

through the Jewish Colonisation Association, by Baron Edmond de Rothschild, to whom the new Jewish settlement in Palestine owes so much. But the subvention carries with it no interference in the internal management of the schools, which is left entirely to the colonists.

The colony schools have been spoken of as a whole, but it is not to be imagined that they were originally planned on a single model, or according to the views of a single central authority. They have grown up independently of one another, and therefore differ in character according to differences of local circumstances. But of recent years some degree of co-ordination and conformity to a single standard has been introduced through the work of the *Merkaz ha-Morim*—the Palestinian “National Teachers’ Union,” which appoints teachers for the colony schools, and furthers educational development by the issue of a Hebrew pedagogical journal (*Ha-Chinnuch*) and by other means. When this process of standardisation has been carried somewhat further (assuming that present conditions continue to obtain after the war), the colony schools will form in their totality a national elementary school system—though on a minute scale—with the Baron’s subvention taking the place of State aid, and the *Merkaz ha-Morim* performing some of the functions of a Board of Education.

The colony schools are sometimes criticised—in common with the whole of Zionist work in Palestine—on the ground that they are not “religious” in character. This criticism is largely based on a misunderstanding which is not unnatural in western Jews. The conditions under which Jews live in western countries cause them to regard “Jewish” and “religious” as convertible terms when applied to their own lives. Reading, writing, arithmetic, languages, and so forth are for them “secular” or “non-Jewish” subjects: they are studied by Jews in company with non-Jews, and in the language of the country, and are therefore not specifically Jewish. Such Jewish education as their children receive is given by a special teacher, or in the “religion class,” and is concerned (at all events in theory) solely with “religious” matters. It is analogous to the teaching which the Christian children are given in the Sunday schools. For people accustomed to this state of things it is very difficult to imagine an educational system in which there is no distinction between “Jewish” and

“non-Jewish,” and in which the day-school performs the functions both of the “secular” school and of the “religion class.” There is obviously no need for special classes to teach the child of a Palestinian colonist Hebrew, which is his natural language, and the language in which he receives all his instruction; nor is there need for special classes to teach him about the feasts and fasts of the Jewish calendar, or the ceremonial observances, because these are part of the texture of his life, and he becomes familiar with their historical origin through learning the history of his people as an ordinary school subject. The character of Jewish life, and the facts of Jewish history, are such that a Hebrew school in a Hebrew-speaking colony cannot be “secular” in the sense of shutting out everything which western Jews call “religious”; and if this fact is remembered, much of the criticism of the colony schools is at once discounted. But it is true, generally speaking, that the schools do not aim at cultivating a “religious spirit,” or at enforcing ceremonial observance. Nor is it part of their real function to do so, since the attitude of the individual in matters of that kind must be determined by temperament and the custom of the home, rather than by the teaching of the school. This does not mean that the colony schools have necessarily attained the ideal attitude on the problem of religious education. There is room for experiments of different kinds, like the “Talmud Torahs” founded in the colony of Petach-Tikvah and elsewhere by a German Jewish organisation, which aim at giving a more “orthodox” bent to the children’s minds than they are thought likely to acquire in the ordinary colony school. But ultimately the ideals of a school, in this as in other matters, must reflect the wishes of those for whose benefit the school exists, and cannot be strait-waistcoated by theorists at a distance.

Schools of the elementary type are the only schools in the agricultural colonies, none of which is as yet large enough to need a Grammar School of its own. But the growth of the colonisation movement naturally produced a demand for secondary education, and led to the foundation of secondary schools in the towns, where the needs of elementary education had already been met to some extent by the philanthropic organisations. Not that Zionist effort in the field of elementary education has been entirely confined to the colonies. The Hebrew Girls’ School in Jaffa, founded some years ago by the

Chovevé Zion of Odessa, is entirely a creation of the new spirit, which demands that Jewish education in Palestine shall be national: and the recent difference with the *Hilfsverein* led to the secession from the schools of that body of a number of nationally-minded teachers, who founded Hebrew schools in Jerusalem, Jaffa, and Haifa. But it remains true that elementary education in the towns is mostly in the hands of the philanthropic organisations. In secondary education, on the other hand, the Zionist movement has led the way, and it is in this field that it has produced its most considerable educational achievement—the Hebrew Secondary School of Tel-Aviv (the Hebrew suburb of Jaffa). For the Jaffa *Gymnasium*, as it is called, though not directly founded by the Zionist organisation, is a product of the Zionist spirit, and its building stands on land of the Jewish National Fund.

The Jaffa *Gymnasium* was founded in 1907, to meet the demand for a more advanced education than could be obtained in the Hebrew schools then existing in Palestine. The resources of the Committee which started it were small, but they were fortunate in securing the sympathy and assistance of Alderman Moser, of Bradford, who provided a handsome and capacious building, and has liberally supported the school for many years. Financial difficulties were not the most serious with which the promoters of the school had to contend. They set out to give a modern higher education in a language which had never been used for that purpose. They had to create the terminology required for teaching scientific subjects, and the teachers themselves had to learn before they could teach. Moreover, the *Gymnasium* attracted pupils from Russia, who were not familiar with Hebrew as a spoken idiom, and this added to the difficulty of making Hebrew the sole medium of instruction. But what seemed impossible was achieved. To-day the curriculum of the *Gymnasium* embraces, in the higher classes, mathematics, physics, chemistry and Latin, besides European languages, Turkish and Arabic. A number of Universities in Europe have accepted its leaving certificate as equivalent to that of a European Secondary School. The experiment has thus been amply justified from a general educational standpoint. And the popularity of the *Gymnasium* is proved by the fact that the number of its pupils, which was under 100 in 1907, had risen to 700 before the war—this in

spite of the fact that a certain amount of hostility has been aroused by the alleged non-religious or anti-religious character of the school. What has been said above on this subject in regard to the colony schools is true also of the *Gymnasium*; but the *Gymnasium* has had to face severer criticism, both because it is more in the public eye, and because the scope of its education is wider, and therefore gives more points for attack. In particular, the use of the methods of "higher criticism" in Bible teaching has been fastened on as indicating an anti-Jewish tendency. This question is a thorny one, and its discussion is not rendered easier by the fact that critics of the school are wont to talk as though "higher criticism" were doled out to the pupils in the lowest classes: while in the heat of attack and defence there is a tendency to overlook the important fact that the *Gymnasium* does make an honest attempt to bring home to its pupils both the spiritual value and the beauty of the Bible, and is in that sense working on truly national lines. Nor is any lack of reverence for Jewish tradition evident among the pupils, who study Talmud with as much zest as could be expected in any *Yeshibah*. The war has sent many of them temporarily back to Europe, and those who meet these products of the *Gymnasium* education will find in them no evidence of the undermining tendencies of which the school is accused in certain quarters. It is necessary in dealing with the *Gymnasium* to distinguish between criticism of detail, which may be well founded, and general accusations of un-Jewishness, which emanate from those who are hostile to the national revival. Judged from the standpoint of the revival, the *Gymnasium* is a contribution of high value to the work of Jewish national education.

There is a second *Gymnasium*, in Jerusalem, which is smaller than that at Jaffa, and somewhat more orthodox in tendency. There is also at Jaffa a higher-grade school, called *Tachkemoni*, which was founded by the orthodox wing of Zionists (the Mizrahi). Beyond these three schools secondary education in Palestine has not gone. The proposed Technical School at Haifa is in abeyance, thanks to the volte-face of the *Hilfsverein* on the language question; and the Hebrew University is as yet but a project, to be realised, one may hope, soon after the return to normal conditions.

In the *Bezalel* School of Arts and Crafts, at Jerusalem, the

national movement has attacked the problem of education on the artistic side. The attempt to create a specifically Jewish art is fraught with many difficulties. Broadly speaking, Jewish artists are not Jewish except by birth: their subjects and methods of treatment are borrowed. The Jewish tradition of the last few centuries is almost wholly devoid of any interest in art. It cannot yet be said whether the carpets and wood-work and filigree-work of the *Bezalel* will stand out as creations at once artistically valuable and specifically Jewish in character. But at least the work of the *Bezalel* has already done much to stimulate the national feeling among Jews in many parts of the world. The same is true, in a lesser degree, of the lace-work schools of the Union of Jewish Women for Cultural Work in Palestine. They are symptomatic of the craving of the national spirit to express itself in all possible ways.

The work of national education in Palestine, like the colonisation movement of which it is an integral part, is still at an early stage of development. What it has achieved so far is to establish Hebrew as the language of the schools, and to indicate the lines on which the various problems can be solved. And that is much. If immigration proceeds at a more rapid rate after the war, and new schools have to be provided quickly to meet the new needs, they will have the existing Hebrew schools as a model to follow. There will be no hesitation as to the possibility of giving a complete education in Hebrew, and no lack of teachers qualified in that language: there will be no foundation for the suggestions, which will no doubt be heard in Europe, that modern schools in Palestine must be English or French or German schools, that Hebrew is a dead language, that Hebrew cannot find words for scientific terms, and so forth. The experiments already made are sufficient to dispose of those suggestions. As the Jewish settlement in Palestine grows, whether quickly or slowly, the network of Hebrew national Schools will grow with it, to perform its function of moulding the children of immigrants from East and West into the nucleus of a healthy Hebrew nation.

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